SOME ACCOUNT

OF THE SO-CALLED

CHURCH

OF

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS.

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PREFACE.

THE Society of 'Mormonites,' or self-styled 'Church of the Latter-day Saints,' whose settlement beyond the Rocky Mountains has been secured to them (with one of their leaders for a governor) by the American government, reckons its numbers at 300,000.

We believe this statement to be an exaggerated one; but the facts which most concern us in connexion with the subject are, that this Mormonite illusion has spread among our own countrymen,—that most of the great towns in England and Scotland possess branch societies, and that emissaries are busy in disseminating plausible tracts among a respectable class of our population, less well-informed in the history of their own faith than on subjects connected with their worldly callings. These facts, it has been thought, call for a short and clear statement of the leading events connected with an imposture which has found so

many dupes, and has ended in the establishment of a legalized society, whose numbers are daily swelling from among our own fellow-citizens, by proselytism on the one hand, and on the other by emigration under the bond of a social union, requiring from its members an express acknowledgment of the religion which the society happens to profess; but avowedly without any regard to their belief in its truth.

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'CHURCH OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS.'

THE Society of 'Mormonites,' or 'Church of the Latter-day Saints,' which is now reckoning its numbers by tens of thousands, and occupying one of the most fertile tracts of land in the Western Hemisphere, took its rise between twenty and thirty years ago, in the United States of America; and, like many other false religions—that of Mahomet especially—owes its existence principally to the wickedness and ingenuity of one man, who having conceived and promulgated a lie for purposes of self-interest, may, perhaps, have ended in believing it: for it is not unfrequently the fatal result of falsehood long continued, that the unhappy author acts it out until his own understanding is darkened, and he can no longer distinguish it from truth.

A man named Joseph Smith, born about the year 1805, at a small village in America, and living afterwards in the State of New York—being one of a family who were notorious for

their dishonourable dealings, and who earned their subsistence chiefly by deluding their neighbours with marvellous tales of gold-digging—this man became, through circumstances which we are about to relate, possessed of a manuscript story, or novel, written with very harmless intentions, but which seemed to him well fitted to become the foundation of a pretended revelation, and thus to be the means of promoting his ambitious and crafty designs.

It appears that, as far back as the year 1809, a person of the name of Spalding, living at Cherry Vale, in the State of New York, who had been a clergyman, but for some reason had retired from the duties of his profession, and who was a man of some literary taste and knowledge, had turned his attention to a subject at that time discussed by antiquarians in the United States—whether, *i. e.*, the remains of some ancient race which had been discovered, might not be traced, along with the origin of the American Indians in whose territory they had been found, to an older and more civilized people—viz., to that portion of the old Jewish nation—the ten tribes of Israel—who had been led into captivity by the Assyrians, far away from their native land, as related in the Second Book of Kings, &c.: some persons having thought that they might possibly have found their way over the continent of Asia, and across

the ocean to America, in their attempt to escape from their enemies; and afterwards sunk into that state of barbarism in which the American Indians have since been found. This fanciful and very harmless theory Mr. Spalding thought might form the groundwork for a religious tale or novel, which should illustrate these supposed facts. He accordingly set to work, and amused his leisure hours by composing a story, or legends, of this lost race, and their adventures during their journey from Jerusalem to Assyria and across the continent of Asia, with their passage to America, under two leaders, whom he called Nephi and Sephi. It was written in close imitation of the Old Testament language, and feigned to have been the records kept by some of the leading personages of the party, among whom the names of Mormon and Moroni—names destined to found a false religion and a real nation—occur. In order to give the whole an appearance of reality, he bestowed on it the name of *The Lost Manuscript*, pretending (though, of course, without meaning to deceive) that it had been found in the earth.

Mr. Spalding's object in writing this novel was to amuse his neighbours and friends, as well as himself; and as the story progressed, they were in the habit of coming from time to time for the purpose of hearing it read.

On Mr. Spalding's removal to Pittsburgh, in

Pennsylvania, he became acquainted with the head of a printing establishment there, to whom he lent his manuscript—a Mr. Pattison—who, thinking it likely to sell advantageously, offered to print it; but Mr. Spalding declining the offer, it was restored to him. Meanwhile, however, it had been copied by a person connected with the establishment, named Sidney Rigdon, afterwards a friend and supporter of Joseph Smith; and through whose means, there can be no doubt, this person obtained possession of the manuscript.

Mr. Spalding died in 1816, and his widow, who afterwards married a person of the name of Davison, attested the truth of this account in the year 1839, when the Society of the Mormonites had increased so as to attract general attention. Her declaration closes with these words:—'And thus an historical romance, with the addition of a few pious expressions, and extracts from the Sacred Scriptures, has been construed into a new Bible, and palmed upon a company of poor deluded fanatics as divine!'

But the leaders of these poor fanatics were by no means deluded: they had planned a scheme by which they designed to make their *own* fortunes at least. It cannot now be ascertained whether this Joseph Smith, a young man of loose character and small education, into whose hands Mr. Spalding's manuscript had fallen, conceived

for the first time, on reading it, or hearing it read, the design of assuming the pretensions of a prophet, or whether he had previously thought of raising himself to notoriety by some scheme of religious delusion, and only seized on the means afforded him (through Sidney Rigdon's piracy) by the innocent ingenuity of a man more learned than himself. Certain it is, that about the year 1830, he began to work out publicly, an imposture as bold as it was profane. He pretended to have received, during several previous years, repeated revelations from Heaven, commanding him to seek in a particular spot for a new Bible, or records of a revelation, which had been preserved by the ten tribes when they emigrated to America. These records were pretended to have been written on golden plates, and to have been enclosed in a stone box, and buried in the ground. So here we have poor Mr. Spalding's story, '*The Lost Manuscript*,' brought forward as *The Book of Mormon*, or, *Gospel of the Latter-day Saints*, with manifold additions profanely attached to it, from the most sacred portions of the New Testament, together with Joseph Smith's audacious declaration of his apostleship;—the words of truth being thus affixed to a lie!

Among the first of his dupes was a farmer named Martin Harris, well to do in the world,—possessed, indeed, of more money than wit, who

lent him fifty dollars to enable him, as he said, to have his new Bible transcribed from the golden plates, translated (for it was pretended to have been found written in unknown characters), and published. But Martin very naturally desired to see these golden plates; whereupon Joseph declared that Martin was not pure in heart enough to be allowed the sight of such a treasure, and that a curse would rest upon him if he attempted to satisfy his curiosity. So the farmer could only obtain the transcript of a small portion on paper, written in characters which the pretended Apostle called the old Egyptian characters; and which he advised him to show to any learned man if he wished to convince himself of its identity. And here, by the way, we may note the assistance probably afforded by Sidney Rigdon, the original pirate of the manuscript, to the designs of his master, from the knowledge of various alphabets picked up in his character of compositor at a great printing-office.

Martin Harris having, I suppose, some slight suspicion that he had been duped, went to the city of New York purposely, it would seem, to put his piece of manuscript into the hands of a learned professor named Anthon,* to whom he had procured a letter. The account of this inter-

* Editor of several new editions of the Classics.

view was given a few years afterwards by the Professor himself in a letter to Mr. Howe, of Painsville, Ohio, when the followers of Joseph Smith, or, as they are generally called, Mormonites, were become numerous enough to attract attention, and a report had been spread that the learned Professor had seen the plates, and declared the inscriptions to have been written in the Egyptian character. The following is the letter in question:

New York, Feb. 17, 1834.

DEAR SIR,—

I received your letter of the 9th, and lose no time in making a reply. The whole story about my pronouncing the Mormonite inscription to be 'reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics' is perfectly false. Some years ago, a plain, apparently simple-hearted farmer called on me with a note from Dr. Mitchell, of our city, now dead, requesting me to decipher, if possible, a paper which the farmer would hand me. Upon examining the paper in question, I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick, perhaps a hoax. When I asked the person who brought it how he obtained the writing, he gave me the following account. A gold book, he said, consisting of a number of plates fastened together by wires of the same material, had been dug up in the northern part of the State of New York, and along with it an enormous pair of spec-

tacles! Whoever, he said, examined the plates through the glasses, was enabled, not only to read them, but to understand their meaning. All this knowledge, however, was confined to a young man who had the trunk containing the book in his sole possession. This young man was placed behind a curtain in a garret in a farm-house, and being thus concealed from view, he put on the spectacles occasionally, deciphered the characters in the book, and having committed some of them to paper, handed copies from behind the curtain to those who stood outside. Not a word was said about their having been deciphered by the gift of God. The farmer added, that he had been requested to contribute a sum of money towards the publication of the 'golden book,' the contents of which would, as he was told, produce an entire change in the world and save it from ruin. So urgent had been these solicitations, that he intended selling his farm and giving the amount to those who wished to publish the plates. As a last precautionary step, however, he had resolved to come to New York, and obtain the opinion of the learned about the meaning of the paper which he had brought with him, and which had been given him as part of the contents of the book, although the translation had, at that time, been made by the young man with the spectacles.

On hearing this story, I changed my opinion

about the paper; and instead of viewing it any longer as a hoax, I began to regard it as part of a scheme to cheat the farmer of his money, and I communicated my suspicions to him, warning him to beware of rogues. He requested an opinion from me in writing, which, of course, I declined to give; and he then took his leave, taking his paper with him.

This paper in question was, in fact, a singular scroll. It consisted of all kinds of crooked characters, disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses, and flourishes, roman letters inverted or placed sideways, were arranged and placed in perpendicular columns; and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle, divided into various compartments, decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied after the Mexican Calendar, given by Humboldt, but copied in such a way as not to betray the source from whence it was derived. I am thus particular as to the contents of the paper, inasmuch as I have frequently conversed with my friends on the subject since the Mormon excitement began, and well remember that the paper contained anything else but 'Egyptian hieroglyphics.'

Some time after, the same farmer paid me a second visit. He brought with him the 'gold

book' in print, and offered it for sale. I declined purchasing. He then asked permission to leave the book with me for examination. I declined receiving it, although his manner was strangely urgent. I adverted once more to the roguery which, in my opinion, had been practised upon him, and asked him what had become of the gold plates? He informed me that they were in a trunk, with the spectacles. I advised him to go to a magistrate, and have the trunk examined. He said, 'the curse of God' would come upon him if he did. On my pressing him, however, to go to a magistrate, he told me he would open the trunk if I would take 'the curse of God' upon myself. I replied, 'I would do so with the greatest willingness, and would incur every risk of that nature, provided I could only extricate him from the grasp of rogues.' He then left me.

I have given you a full statement of all that I know respecting the origin of Mormonism, and must beg you, as a personal favour, to publish this letter immediately, should you find my name mentioned again by these wretched fanatics.

Yours respectfully,

CHARLES ANTHON.

After such testimony to the imposture practised on the poor simple farmer,—who however became, in spite of it, a second time duped,—we

may well be surprised that this gross imposture should have held its ground, and the Society of Mormonites grown and flourished. But as it has been truly said, that which enters not into the mind through the door of reason, reason itself cannot dislodge. Besides, Joseph Smith and his companions practised on the ignorance, simplicity, and cupidity of their followers, as Mahomet had done before them on his, by brilliant promises of a millennium of worldly prosperity,—and like Mahomet, he had a revelation at hand for every promise or command he wished to promulgate. The Mormonites, too, like the followers of Mahomet, were destined to form a state, as well as a church, administered by the same chief; and Joseph's scheme being well organized, and his laws admitting of no idleness or drunkenness (though loose enough in some other points) among his subjects, they speedily grew in outward prosperity, whilst their leaders found means of enriching themselves through the credulity of these willing dupes.

Joseph, indeed, though a self-constituted apostle and high priest, &c., &c., did not scruple to follow other gainful callings; he was for many years a banker and storekeeper in Kirkland, and enjoyed, of course, large profits among his people.

Thus the society increased in wealth and numbers, though often cruelly persecuted by their

neighbours, who, naturally indignant at the profane and ridiculous pretensions of these 'Latter-day Saints,' as they call themselves, and the daring falsehood of their leaders, forgot that Christians are forbidden to put down false religions by the sword, or by any sort of cruelty or injustice.

The result of several popular commotions, however, was, that the Mormonites were banished from the state of Missouri, where they had settled, and obliged to emigrate to the Illinois State, where they established themselves on a fertile tract of land near the river Missisippi, where they prospered and multiplied, and built a town, called Nauvoo, where Joseph Smith assumed the office of mayor, with the power of an absolute king, having his bands of soldiers, trained and equipped, and a body-guard for his personal defence, his immediate followers, Sidney Rigdon, Orson Pratt, and a few others, forming his council, and arrogating to themselves, together with their master, the title of 'the twelve Apostles!'

Thus did the crafty founder of this society appear to have attained the objects for which he bartered his soul to the father of lies. But his enjoyment of them was not of long duration. The self-styled apostle and prophet, who had promised himself and his followers a long and prosperous reign on earth, came to an untimely end. During a struggle with the lawful authorities of the United

States, he was defeated, and surrendered himself, and his brother Hyrom, on condition of their personal safety. They were imprisoned; but it was found impossible to protect their lives; a lawless mob forcing their way into the place where they were confined, cruelly put them to death.

Though the falsity of their prophetical pretensions was thus signally proved, successors to Joseph and his brother were not wanting. After many internal disputes (during which Sidney Rigdon was cast off), a man named Brigham Young obtained the ascendancy, and succeeded to the presidency or chief apostleship of the Mormonite church and state. Under him the society continued to prosper, until again coming into collision with the neighbouring population, there was another rising against them, and they were severely and cruelly handled. At length, they determined to emigrate a second time, and abandoning their home in the Illinois, to seek a settlement beyond the Rocky Mountains. After long and difficult journeyings and sojournings among the native tribes, they succeeded in crossing those stupendous mountains, and finally located themselves in the fertile valley of the Great Salt Lake between the States of New California and Oregon, where they have built themselves a city. This settlement has been guaranteed to them by the United States government, under the name of

'Utah,' (though the Mormonites call it 'Deseret,') and Brigham Young appointed governor, at their desire. Thus are the Mormonites enjoying again that worldly prosperity for which their leaders bartered their souls. It is said to have been some persons from among their people, who were disbanded, after serving in the Mexican war, that discovered the golden treasures of California.

But a melancholy part of the Mormonite history, and the one with which we are most concerned, remains to be told. Before the death of Joseph Smith, it had been determined by himself and his counsellors to send out preachers into other lands, in order to bring over the ignorant, the careless, and unwary professors of Christianity to the Church of the Latter-day Saints,' and induce them to emigrate to America, and join the brethren. This plan was probably suggested by the necessity of swelling their numbers, in order to reach the amount of population which would give them a claim to be recognised as a State by the government of their own country.

Emissaries were accordingly sent out both to several parts of Europe and to England; and branch societies formed throughout Great Britain for the purpose of obtaining emigrations, and of making converts from among those who were really ignorant of the faith in which they had themselves been brought up, and also among

those who, being indifferent to it, were easily seduced by the prospects of worldly prosperity which the society held out, and, perhaps, by the freedom from some moral restraints which it allowed, for there can be no doubt that great immorality was not only permitted, but legalized, under the sanction of religious rites, though it is said to be repudiated by the present rulers of this Body. They were joined, too, at an early period of their existence, by persons from our own country, who afterwards acted as agents and tract-writers—men not wanting in ability, too intelligent, in fact, to be dupes,—one Orson Pratt, among others,—who put forth pamphlets, clever and plausible to a certain point, and written in a logical and argumentative form, so as to take with persons unaccustomed to reason. These pamphlets, artfully setting aside the peculiar absurdities and impieties of the Mormonite pretensions, and relying on the testimony of their leaders as all-sufficient, argued on the probability of a new revelation being granted to man in these latter days, seeing that many evils have crept into the Church, and that sin often disgraces the Christian name; For these people call themselves Christians—the Christians, or 'Saints of the Latter-days.' Now, this argument being wisely kept apart from the particular absurdities of the scheme it is intended to serve, has a sufficient

show of reason to call for a reply, since it cannot be called *impossible*—though the whole tenour of Scripture is against it—that a revelation should again be made to man. The answer, however, is simple. Admitting the *possibility* of such an event, we have a right to expect, and therefore to insist that it shall be attested, as all God's revelations have hitherto been attested, by miracles; and on no other evidence should we presume to receive any fact or theory pretending to be divine, however it might approve itself to our reason.

Now the only testimony brought to the truth of this pretended revelation is that of Joseph Smith's word! It is vain to say that he worked miracles; because even his deluded followers are aware, that at the time of the cholera, and on other occasions, though this pretended apostle did actually and impiously try, he signally failed to impose even the semblance of a miracle on his own credulous followers.* The dreams and visions, to which he could with more safety make

* To show how ignorance lays open the unwary to be deceived even by the ordinary phenomena of nature, it may be mentioned that one of the leaders of this deluded people, during some of their night-wanderings (while emigrating), describes, in his journal, dated Nov. 13, the appearance of those meteors, or falling stars, which are looked for by astronomers on that day in every year, but which he supposed to be some new and miraculous testimony of the divine approbation of their undertaking.

pretensions, could not, even had they been real, have afforded any proof *to others* of his inspired mission. It is not in this way that the Almighty has always attested the truth of the revelations which He has made through his messengers. The Lord Jesus himself referred to his miracles as pledges to mankind of the truth of his pretensions. 'If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.' And again: 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.' 'The works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me,' &c. And our Lord's Apostles, while bearing witness to his resurrection, and declaring among Jew and Gentiles—many of them his personal enemies—the will of their Master, had this testimony afforded them of the truth of their words—they worked miracles in his name, and were even permitted to confer this gift on certain others. But when the last Apostle died, the last gift of this nature also expired.

It is an awful consideration that every delusion of this nature is, both in its invention and progress, the work of him who has been emphatically called—even by our Lord Himself—'The Father of Lies;' and that this Mormonite imposture was doubtless suggested by him to those who believed themselves the ingenious and original authors of it. The devil is unable to destroy in

some minds *all* belief in the Christian revelation: and for such minds he overlays it with falsehood, so as to conceal the sublime simplicity of Gospel-truth. He has done so with respect to a large portion of the Christian world by means of Romanism and its various modifications; and now, in these latter days, in a far grosser and more impudent form, by the profane assumptions of the self-styled 'Latter-day Saints' — prefigured, no doubt, in some of the vivid descriptions and denunciations of the sacred writers concerning those who should yield themselves 'to believe a lie.'

Enough has been said on the subject of the original Mormonite imposture; for, in fact, little more than an abstract of the history of this people was necessary to disabuse the minds of those who have been deluded by the arguments of their writers. But it seems that a later development of the system has come forth; and concerning this development, we shall add a few words.

It appears that the later and more intelligent leaders of this society, seeking rather to increase its worldly prosperity than to enlarge its pretensions as a Church, have put forth appeals, which differ very much from those made by their founder, 'to the people of other lands.' They have taken advantage also of the cravings for what is called Socialism or Communism, which

exist in modern Europe; and while still seeking to make proselytes among the vulgar, have published an invitation, which will not, we fear, be very unacceptable to that portion of our intelligent population who are holding doctrines scarcely less dangerous, perhaps, though far less absurd, than those of the Mormonists—doctrines which tend to confound truth with falsehood, and to make it indifferent what religion a man professes, if he act out the moral principle within him.

The invitation to which we allude, forms part of an address published two or three years ago, purporting to be 'from the Council of the Twelve Apostles to the Saints throughout the World,' setting forth the advantages of the new Mormon settlement in the far West, its beauty, fertility, and growing wealth; and then going on to say—'The Kingdom of God consists in correct principles; and it mattereth not what a man's religious faith be, whether he be a Presbyterian, or a Methodist, or a Baptist, or a Latter-day Saint, or a Mormon, or a Campbellite, or a Catholic, or Episcopalian, or Mahometan, or even Pagan, or anything else; if he will bow the knee, and *confess with his tongue that Jesus is the Christ*, and will support good and wholesome laws for the regulation of society, we hail him as a brother and will stand by him, as he stands by us in these things; for every man's faith is between his own

soul and God alone. . . . Our universal motto is, 'Peace with God, and goodwill to all men.''

So we find that the name of Christ is to be retained by this nation of brethren, without any regard to its sacred reality, or to the great truths it involves, but simply as the watchword of Socialism!

Such, then, is the latest development of Mormonism, though its original absurdities and impieties are still protected by its leaders, held sacred by their followers, and recommended to the ignorant and unwary among ourselves.

And thus, you see, you are required to trust yourselves and your consciences to a Church which has no faith in the religion it professes, and to a people so indifferent in respect of truth and falsehood, that they are willing to receive as brethren those who are as ready as themselves to act out a lie—to bow, namely, at the sacred name of Him whose very existence they deny! Such is their 'Peace with God, and goodwill to man.' And such the history, and the sequel to the history, of MORMONISM—the so called 'Church of the Latter-day Saints.''

THE END.